

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Recovery from cocaine addiction: "My counselor gave me a reality check."



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"Stacey" is recovering from a cocaine addiction. Counseling is very helpful to her. (This story is based on the experiences of real people whose names have been changed.)



I began my recovery from cocaine addiction November 24th last year. I got into cocaine at parties. At first it was for fun. Then I kept taking it because it gave me energy and made me feel strong and confident. It gave me good feelings inside, but it made me act like a real jerk to everyone else, and I didn't see it. I started to get edgy and impatient, and got into fights with friends for no good reason. I ended two relationships and lost my best friend that way.

Losing that friend finally made me stop and look at what a mess my life had become. I called a crisis hotline, and they got me an appointment at a women's counseling center in town.

The center gave me a lot of help. They introduced me to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. They talked me through withdrawal symptoms when I was first getting off cocaine. They got me to a doctor's checkup to make sure my body was working OK after the cocaine abuse and withdrawal. They introduced me to a drug counselor who ran support groups and met with people one-on-one.

One-on-one counseling was the most helpful for me. For a few months, I saw my counselor once or twice a week. Now I check in twice a month, to tell her how I'm doing.

Counseling let me see myself in a new way. I realized that feeling bad about myself made me want to use. When I was sad or angry, I'd try to erase those feelings with cocaine. My counselor helped me learn to recognize when I'm stressed out, and do things to help myself feel better. She taught me the initials "HALT": "H" for "hungry," "A" for "angry," "L" for "lonely," and "T" for "tired." When you're feeling any of those things, you're more in danger of slipping up and using drugs to try to feel better. So the best thing to do is "halt": stop what you're doing and take care of yourself right away—get something to eat, blow off some steam, find someone to talk to, or get some rest.

Once, I relapsed after I ran into my old dealer. "It was just an accident," I told my counselor. "I ran into him on the way to the store." But my counselor saw my denial and gave me a reality check. "Why the store in his neighborhood?" she asked me. I realized that I went there to tempt myself into using. Now I know not

to go to that neighborhood anymore.

Learn more: After recovery, Stacey's life is different. Read more [about her new life](#).

Do you know someone who has an addiction? [Find help](#).